

THE SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP

be united to Him by partaking in the sufferings that He endured on earth. At length it seemed that her heart was broken *by* the force of her love. " So great," she said, " was the fire of divine love and of the desire of uniting myself with Him I loved, that, if my heart had been of stone or of iron, it would have been broken in like manner." It was on a Sunday in the autumn of this year, 1370, when this mystical death fell upon her—a trance of some four hours' duration—in which her friends all thought her actually dead, and filled her cell with cries and lamentations, [in this suspension of her bodily life, Catherine believed that she had really died, that her soul entered into eternity, tasted the Blessedness of the vision of the Divine Essence, and, like Dante, beheld the spiritual lives of Heaven, Purgatory, and Hell. Like Dante, she was bidden repeat to the living what she had seen, *in fro del mondo che mal vive*:—

" Whilst my soul beheld all these things, the eternal Bride-groom, whom I thought fully to possess, said to her : * Seest thou of what great glory they are deprived, and with what grievous torments they are punished, who offend Me ? Return, then, and make known to them their error, their danger, and loss.' And, for that my soul shrank with horror from this return, the Lord added : * The salvation of many souls demands thy return, thou shalt not any more keep that way of life that thou hast hitherto kept, nor shalt thou henceforth have thy cell for habitation ; nay, thou shalt have to go forth from thine own city for the welfare of souls. I shall be always with thee, and shall guide thee and bring thee back ; thou shalt bear the honour of My name and witness to spiritual things before small and great, the laity no less than the clergy and religious ; for I shall give thee speech and wisdom which none will be able to withstand. I shall lead thee, too, before the pontiffs and rulers of the Churches and of the Christian people, in order that, as is My wont, by means of the weak I may confound the pride of the strong.' "¹

Fra Bartolommeo di Domenico tells us that he was preaching in San Domenico when the report was spread that Catherine had ¹ *Legenda*, II. vi. 1-9, 17, 20-23 (§§ 15-16, 206, 212-216).